'Media and Terrorism', the Conference Conclusions and Recommendations

Closing Remarks by the Ambassador Bruce G. Berton, Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina; 2 September 2018, Mt. Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina;

Introduction

- Dear media representatives, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, partners, it's a great pleasure to be standing in front of you once again at this important event.

- I am very pleased to hear that over the past one and a half days you have had some vibrant discussions, and that from this, the highly complex interaction between the media and terrorism has become a little clearer.

- As I mentioned in my opening remarks, terrorism and violent extremism are problems which we will unfortunately have to contend with for many years to come. As the most important channel for shaping public opinion, the media has a crucial role to play, and often a heavy burden to bear.

- Similarly, the political establishment also has a great responsibility, and isn't always playing a positive role. Some domestic leaders' use of rhetoric spreading intolerance and hate - unfortunately sometimes picked up by the media - only serves to weaken society and open up space for radicalization that leads to terrorism.

- While I don't intend to go into too much detail, please allow me to briefly summarize the main points from each of the sessions.

Panel One - Reporting on terrorism in online, print and electronic media

- As noted in first panel, it is clear that reporting on terrorism is fraught with challenges. While it is critical that journalists inform the public of events which have taken place, if they are not careful, they could inadvertently help the perpetrators achieve their over-arching objective; that of spreading division and fear.

- Indeed, as has often been mentioned, "terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims". With this in mind, and as is outlined in the fantastic UNESCO Guidebook in this topic, journalists must "resist the urge to sensationalize matters in the interest of attracting eyeballs, ears or clicks."

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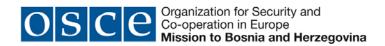**Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina**

- One particular point from the panel grabbed my attention here – while journalists must be careful about *how* they report (by following crucial media ethics standards), they can also choose on *what* to report. Yes, they should report the facts, but there are humans behind the facts whose stories should be told.

- In doing so, journalists can cut through the carnage and political agenda of the attackers, to reveal the humanity of the victims and the heroism of those brave individuals who put themselves at risk to help - a taxi driver ferrying injured persons to hospital or an injured nurse patching up the wounds of other victims. In doing so, journalists can undermine the terrorists' strategy by putting the focus back on the values which bind us all together.

- In the words of one of panelists, we need to "go from a reflexive form of journalism to a reflective form of journalism", especially when engaging in the difficult discussion of terrorism.

Panel Two - Western Balkans perspectives

- Panel two's discussions served to situate the issue of terrorism locally. The Western Balkans is threatened by terrorism, in the same way as the rest of the world. While the post-war context and specific socio-economic conditions need to be recognized as vulnerabilities, the scale of the problem should not be over-emphasized.

- Media of the region need to recognize this and assiduously avoid sensationalist or blatantly inaccurate reporting. Recent examples of this range from hugely inflated estimates of the numbers of foreign terrorist fighters to wild generalizations about the embedded nature of the problem. Such an approach is counter-productive to tackling the issue.

- An interesting example given by one panelists was a house in Tesanj where guns were found when it was being pulled down - with the subsequent news article choosing to mention that it was "in the vicinity of a mosque."

- This additional – and let's be clear – completely irrelevant piece of information was a key point in the panel's discussion, that is, the singling out of Muslims and Islam as a direct security threat. The depiction of Novi Pazar as a hub of radicalization was given as an example of this, as was the differing description of the other groups going to fight abroad.

- Media outlets have a crucial role to play in ensuring that they do not 'brand' the region as specifically problematic or enflame inter-ethnic or political tensions. The Western Balkans is a region of great diversity – this should be depicted as what it is - a great strength - rather than a point of weakness.

- As such, journalists should not rush into qualifying an incident as terrorism or inaccurately utilize terminology which has serious connotations. In order to avoid doing

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so, they need to be sensitized to the specific definitions and regional specific guidelines should be developed. Moreover, security experts should be consulted in order to ensure context and accuracy.
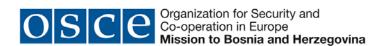
Panel Three – Responsible reporting, ethnics and dealing with sources

- Moving on to panel three, the discussions explored slightly broader areas, which are nonetheless linked with the challenges I've already outlined.

- Journalists are often under a tremendous amount of pressure from their editors to provide the kind of writing which attracts readers or viewers – sometimes their very jobs depend upon it. In environments of high unemployment, such as in many of the countries of the region, they are placed in an extremely difficult situation.

- Many participants also indicated that this pressure on journalists is often transferred from the pressure placed on editors by politicians. This is done with the aim of manipulating sensitive issues for political gain – unfortunately the topic terrorism is not immune from this influence. Such attacks on freedom of media need to be addressed.

- In parallel journalists must continue to be guided by their ethical standards. Without this, and given the amplified voice they have, they can cause a great deal of social damage. As succinctly outlined by Aidan White, this should include (1) accuracy and fact-based information; (2) independence; (3) impartiality; (4) humanity (5) transparency and accountability.

- To bring us back to the issue of terrorism, precision and clarity of language are key to explaining the gravity and tragedy of a situation without miss-leading the audience, sensationalizing events, or making value judgments.

Panel Four – Analysis of social media in the process of radicalization

- Finally, panel four sought to analyze the impact of social media in the process of radicalization. As was mentioned in previous panels, terrorism is not a new phenomenon. What is comparatively new, however, is the technology which allows for news of attacks to spread around the globe in a matter of minutes.

- The same technology also allows for the hateful messages of terrorist groups to be amplified exponentially and for radicalization and recruitment to occur at a distance. As evidenced by the quality of ISIS' pictures and videos, terrorist groups are more than aware of the power of this technology and employ sophisticated strategies to leverage it.

- For example, their messaging is not just ideological (as is commonly thought), they also employ basic rational choice messaging – claiming that things are simply better within their group and that you'll fit in and be welcome.
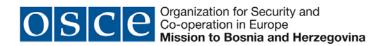
- An interesting point from the panel is that it is very rare that radicalization takes place solely online. In the vast majority of cases there is an online / offline dynamic – with online content being discussed in the community, with leaders and with friends. However, online content is a crucial factor in the overall process and must be addressed.

- Tragically, it is young people who are particularly susceptible to such messaging. This group simultaneously spends the most amount of time online, particularly on social media, and is the most likely to respond to the vivid depictions and glorification of terrorist acts. Added to this is the fact that many young people lack media literacy and are unable to critically evaluate the information they are exposed to.

- So what can we do? Well, our panelists presented some very interesting ideas on this matter. Firstly, we can take down content, but this doesn't remove the desire to view it - counter-messaging is vital. Further, any removal of content must respect the fundamental freedoms of speech and opinion. However, we need to avoid just being defensive. What we need to do is combine this with offensive messaging, poking holes in the terrorist groups' narratives and pointing out their own hypocrisies.

- Secondly, data is of vital importance. We need to learn who is engaging with this content, what they are interested in and what content works? This allows us to tailor our approach through online messaging and direct support to those at risk.

Conclusion

- Dear media representatives, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, partners,

- The OSCE has been explicit in its rejection of violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism and works in numerous spheres in order to prevent it. This particular sphere, where media and terrorism interact, is of crucial importance.

- On that note, let me draw your attention once again to the UNESCO Media and Terrorism Handbook which provides concrete guidance on how to navigate this difficult path.

- While the OSCE Mission BiH was extremely happy to support the translation of this document, and indeed, host this important event, let me assure you that this is nowhere near the end of our engagement.

- Our Mission will continue working with media, and all other stakeholders, to ensure that reporting on terrorism is conducted in a balanced and sensitive manner.

- To that end, we are already working with the BiH Press Council on developing guidelines for reporting on terrorism and we plan to work with media representatives

across the country to raise awareness about the damaging impact of inaccurate and sensationalist reporting.

- Linked to this, we will also work towards addressing the broader concerns you voiced in relation to freedom of media as well as to empower citizens to critically evaluate the information presented to them through the media.

- In closing, let me thank you all once again for joining us here in Jahorina and I look forward to further enhancing our cooperation in the future.